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AUTHOR Bartelo, Dennise M.; Wheeler, Thomas S.
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ABSTRACT

The nature of children's communication processes of listening, speaking, reading, and drawing/writing that occur during story time is explored in this paper, which describes story time as a literacy event. The framework that children develop during story-time can serve as a vehicle for language arts instruction. In helping children cultivate literacy skills, teachers must provide opportunities for children to make use of all available possibilities for communication. Stories should not merely represent a literary experience but should also be an interactive experience between the child, teacher, and text. The story-time experience shows the child as a "meaning-seeker," and this search for meaning in language must be enhanced if language is to be experienced as a natural, meaningful, and whole entity. A four-page bibliography concludes the report. (DF)

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Story-time Connections: A Cognitive Map of Communication Processes

by

Dennise M. Bartelo

and

Thomas S. Wheeler

Virginia Tech

Northern Virginia Graduate Center

Falls Church, Virginia

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Story-time Connections: A Cognitive Map of Communication Processes

This paper will explore the nature of the child's communication processes of listening, speaking, reading, drawing/writing which occur during story-time in the construction of meaning. First, a description of story-time as a literacy event will be given, and then models representing cognitive maps of the communication processes will be examined. The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of the dimensions of the story-time experience and children's development of language and literacy skills.

Story-time: A Literacy Event

Storying is one of the many uses of language in our culture. It is a process of ordering and conveying experiences through the use of narratives (Wade, 1983). Children find much delight in hearing and telling stories, and so stories are a natural way to introduce children to language. Young children learn language as a system of meanings in situational contexts and through interaction with others in particular social settings, such as the story circle in the elementary classroom. Children's sense of story (their structuring and interpretation of experiences) can provide clues to their language structures, their use of the communication processes of

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listening, speaking, reading, drawing/writing, and also insight into the development of children's ability to represent meaning.

Using children's literature for a story-time activity has long been a traditional experience in the elementary school. A child's background of experience with books, book language, and adult language models facilitates the development of language and literacy skills (Holdaway, 1979; Clay, 1979; Taylor, 1983). The classroom environment can be a supportive setting in helping children build up a "store of knowledge" about language- how it sounds, what it looks like in print, and what it means (Feeley, 1983). Clay (1979) found that as children develop an awareness of written language, they learn that:

1. print can be turned into speech
2. books contain a recorded message
3. pictures are a rough guide to that message
4. some language units occur more than others
5. there is a particular message with words in a particular order in books
6. memory helps them with this message (p.59).

Recent research in literacy has examined the connection between story experiences and children's construction of meaning (e.g., 1985; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Teale, 1984; Cochran-Smith, 1983). Most research has tended to isolate the communication processes of listening, speaking, reading, drawing, and writing,

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rather than view these processes from a holistic perspective. The premise that reading to children contributes directly to their literacy development is widely accepted by educators (Teale, 1984).
But what is the nature of the communication processes of listening, speaking, reading, drawing/writing which occur during story-time? How do these processes reflect children's abilities to construct and assign meaning to story-time experiences?

The following figures are models which represent the story-time episode featuring the teacher, story, and child as audience. The figures will feature the communication processes of listening, speaking, reading, drawing/writing from an interactionalist perspective. Heuristically, these models will help further our understanding of children's use of the communication processes in their construction of meaning during story-time.

The Story Reading Episode

Figure 1 presents a conceptualization of the nature of the story reading episode. The teacher selects a book to read-aloud, based on the ages and developmental aspects of the children, their interests, and the number of children to be involved in the story reading experience. The quality of literature and various features of the text such as the topic and format, illustrations, style of writing, text patterns and print organization are also

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considered.

The teacher prepares for the story reading by reading the book silently to understand the story grammar and vocabulary concepts which will be presented to the children, as well as to practice the pacing, pronunciation, and voice characterizations. Story introduction, discussions and follow-up activities are also considered during this preparation time.

The reading of the story takes place in a comfortable, supportive setting, where reading and writing are modeled by the teacher, and prediction, involvement in reading-along, and exploring and making sense of print is encouraged. Instruction integrates the exploration of meanings in the real world, in literature, and throughout the curriculum to provide integral association between listening, speaking, drawing/writing, and reading. The child and the teacher assume interactive participative roles in the story reading episode. The child is encouraged to comment and question as the story is being read to aid the child in receiving and responding to the story.

Listening

Figure 2-1 depicts the listening process, a multi-dimensional skill which the child begins with in early life, and which provides a foundation for the development of talking, reading, and writing (Temple & Gillet, 1984). In describing listening as a language act, auditory acuity

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and perception of sounds are prerequisites for effective listening. The ability of the child to hear different letter sounds in words (auditory discrimination), blend these sounds into words, and remember these sounds in the sequence heard (auditory-sequential-memory) are factors which effect the reception of the units of language which make up the message. Expectation of a message, interest, attention, and concentration contribute to the comprehension of the message, and ultimately to reaction on complex thinking levels.

Listening Functions and Features

A child's familiarity with the language structures, words, ideas, language functions, and background of experience with the situation influence the kinds of listening chosen by the child (Figure 2-2). The child may choose to listen at one of these various levels, as outlined by Fisher & Terry (1982):

1. marginal- somewhat aware of sounds but not actively responding
2. attentive- actively focusing on getting information, finding the main idea, sequence
3. appreciative- responding for the enjoyment and stimulation of creative thoughts
4. [illegible] of view, bias (p.134)

At this point, the child is exerting attention on

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the message and may reflect upon it, formulate questions, extend the message, and/or interject a response through drawing/writing or speaking.

Speaking

Figure 3 represents the modality of speaking. Children need experience listening to and using language. As children develop an awareness of language, they acquire language by interacting with the signs, symbols, and signals (sounds, words, and sentences) in their environment. As this metalinguistic awareness increases, Slobin (1973) has observed that children use self-corrections and re-phrasings in speech; they comment on the pronunciation, dialect, style, volume, appropriateness of language; ask explicit questions about speech; comment on their own speech, and respond to direct questions about language. Children go through a sequence of stages of language use, and formulate and construct language rules of their speech community.

Speaking Functions and Features

Children direct their utterances to serve different functions and learn to use language meaningfully for a variety of purposes (Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982). Halliday (1973) explained that for children, all language is doing something by serving particular needs. Holdaway (1979) summarized Halliday's functions of language into these categories:

1. Imaginative- "Let's pretend" function

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2. Representational- "This is how it is" function

3. Instrumental- "I want" function

4. Regulatory- "Don't do that" function

5. Interactional- "I love you"-relating to others function

6. Personal- "This is me" -defining self function

7. Heuristic- "What's that"-finding out function

(Holdaway, 1979, p.148)

Thus as children grow in their ability to use and understand the phonemes (sounds), words (morphemes), diverse vocabulary, semantic and syntactic structures of language, "they learn language as a system of meanings in situational contexts and through interaction with other persons within these social settings" (Hoffman & McCully, 1984).

The settings (registers) in which children use language- ceremonial, formal, informal, or intimate (personal), require children to use different language skills, and causes them to vary the tone, volume, intonation, rate, and speech dialect. As children generate a response, they show flexibility and spontaneity in their sentence constructions, and perhaps caption-like speech and "talking like a book"-[Here is a/Once upon a time] features (Clay, 1979). Through these responses, we can observe their attempts to focus upon, question, refine, clarify, reinterpret, and extend the communication experience.

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Both speaking and listening involve the sending and receiving of messages, and are not separate processes but two more facets of the communication process.

Writing

Writing, (Figure 4-1) like speaking, is another vehicle for sharing ideas with others. In developing an awareness of language, children learn to : understand that print talks; build up memories of common words they can construct out of letters; become flexible in their use of sentences, and discipline the expression of their ideas within the spelling and punctuations of English (Clay, 1975, pp.11-12).

Using these understandings about language as a base, children compose text through

1. pre-writing- rehearsing/planning what they want to say, collecting and connecting observations from their experiences and environment through drawing, creative dramatics and literature
2. drafting- selecting, combining and arranging ideas on the page
3. revising- reflecting on what has been said and attempting to say it better through editing and conferencing; and finally producing a polished piece (Norton, 1985; Temple & Gillet, 1984; Murray, 1980)

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Writing Features

The kinds of writing children do include descriptive (conveying of exact images); expository (explaining how to do something); persuasive (convincing the audience to take action); expressive (telling feelings, experiences, point of view); narrative (story-telling), and poetic writing. In looking at the final writing product (Figure 4-2), the functions of writing can be noted, along with the following qualities:

1. Language level- use of signs, words, sentences
2. Message quality- the writing style, words chosen, fluency, imagination and originality
3. Directional principles- use of left-to-right patterns and spacing
4. Handwriting mechanics- letter formation, pressure, legibility
5. Spelling- use of invented and standard spelling
6. Grammar and mechanics- use of the conventions of English
7. Drawings- their role in text, primary or secondary, and their detail, spacial relationships, time lapse, radial "sun" features, and secuence of images

writing shows how the child is actively involved in making "...a unified chunk of meaning from experiences involving language' (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).

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The Reading Process —

Reading (Figure 5) is a complex process that involves the interaction of linguistic, affective, and cognitive factors; vision, memory, knowledge, language, and learning are aspects to be considered in the reading process (Smith, 1978). In reading, children perceive and interpret symbols and pictures as they follow the linear grammatical patterns of words. As children make the connections between symbols and sounds to words and their meaning, they relate words back to their experiences, incorporate new ideas, make inferences and deal with personal interests and attitudes in reading (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1984). Reading is a selecting, predicting, comparing, and confirming activity in which the child extracts a sequence of cues from text to understand the message of the text (Goodman, 1981; Clay, 1979).

Understanding the text involves analyzing the textual information in a planned way, utilizing knowledge of language and story grammar to help predict, interpret, and confirm meaning. The child recognizes main idea, sequence, and cause and effect at the literal level. At the inferential level, the child goes beyond the basic facts of the story and interprets, draws inferences, conclusions, and detects the writer's purpose, style, and tone. At the evaluational level, the child makes judgments about the text, assesses validity, worth, desirability, worth, and appropriateness of the text. In thinking about the text at the creative level, the child

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extends and elaborates the story, synthesizing and applying personal meaning to the message of the text.

The crucial facets of the initial phases of learning to read as well as write are the child's assumptions about the functions and uses of language, the child's concepts of print, familiarity with books, and book language, and the reading strategies, concepts, and attitudes the child is developing in the orientation to literacy (Teale, 1984).

Putting It All Together:Meaning Construction

Figure 6 shows the focus and end product of the story-time situation as the meaning derived from the interaction and integration of all the communication processes of listening, speaking, drawing/writing, and reading. The nature of each communication process is complex, as seen in the previous models, but language is indeed a central component- indeed a foundation- for listening, speaking, drawing/writing, and reading.

This multi-dimensional view of meaning shows how the communication processes, when put into action by the language of stories, can impact children's literacy development by providing a network of associative links in the language system. Each communication process serves a function in helping the child fully process and experience print.

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Conclusion

The framework that children build during story-time can serve as vehicles for language arts instruction. For stories ... Dorothy Strickland (1985) on quoting Garth Brown, "play crucial roles in our ongoing effort to make sense of the world". In helping children develop literacy skills, we as teachers must provide opportunities for children to make use of all available possibilities of written language for communication. Stories should not merely represent a literary experience for the child but be a significant experience where the child is an interactive participant with the teacher and the text.

The story-time experience shows the child as a "meaning-seeker," and this search for meaning in language will be enhanced if language is experienced as a natural, meaningful, whole entity (Schwartz, 1983). The listening, speaking, drawing/writing, and reading models presented in this study are one means of exploring language in the literacy event of story-time from a holistic perspective.

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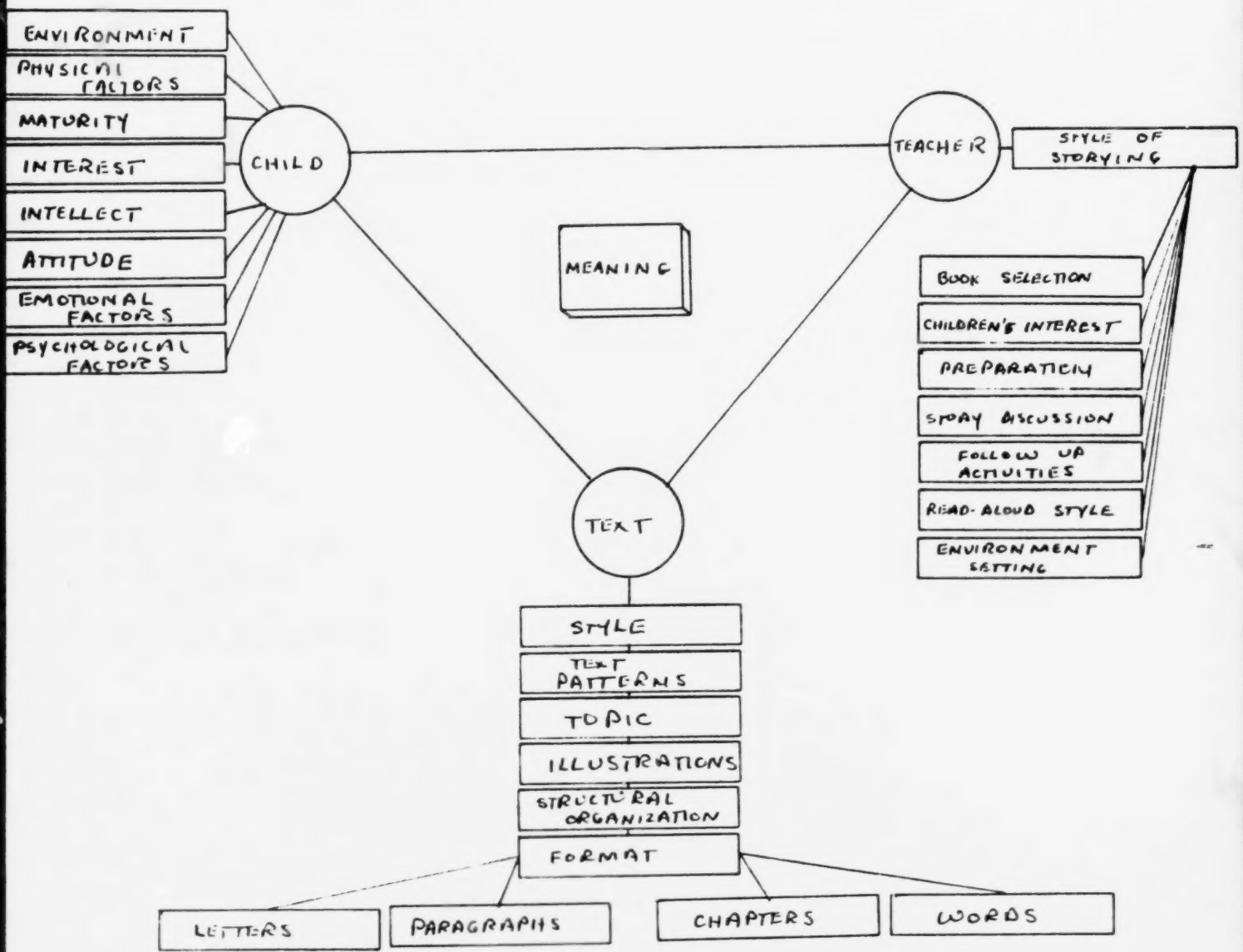

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FIGURE 1. THE STORY READING EPISODE

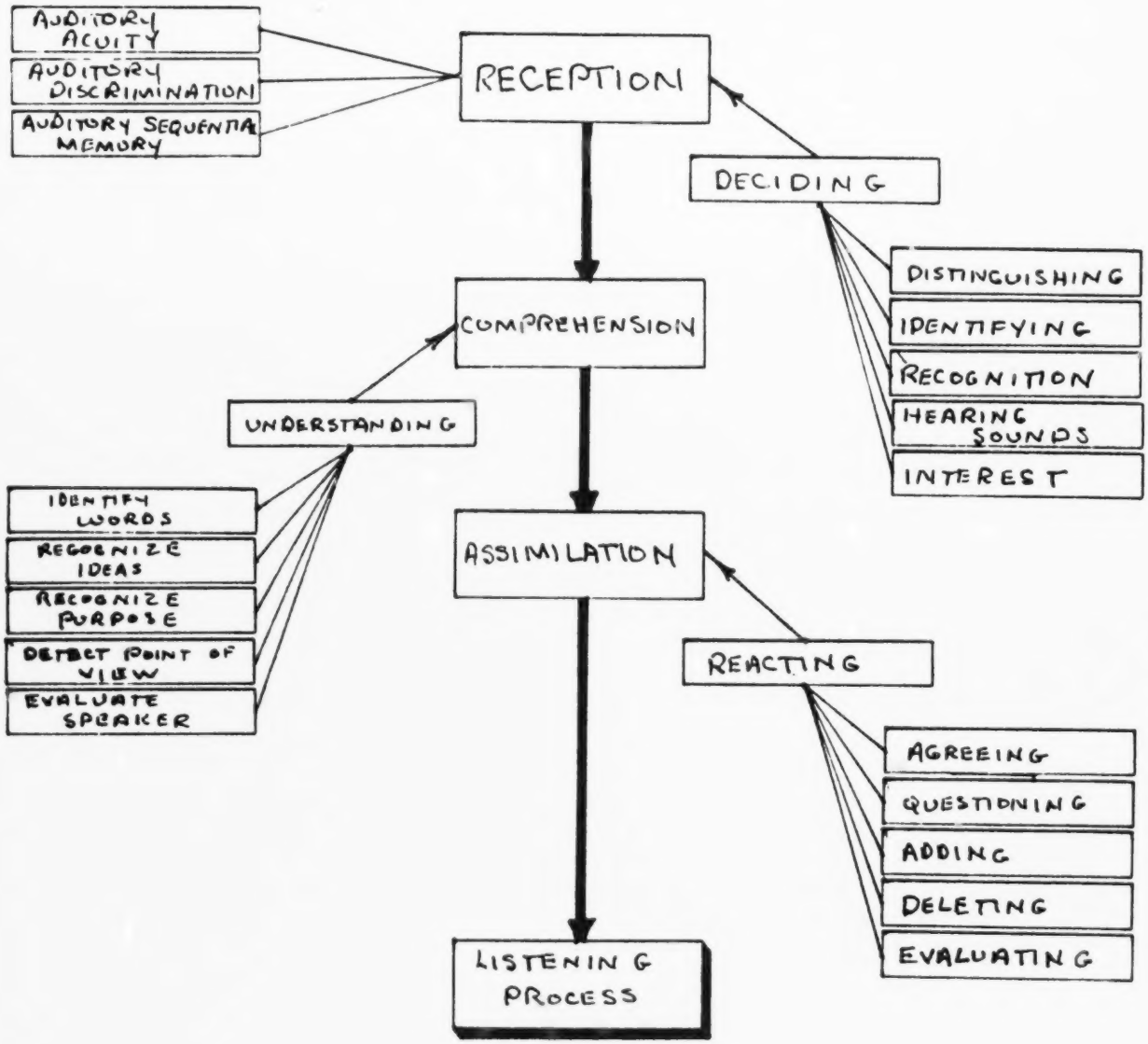

FIGURE 2-1 LISTENING PROCESS

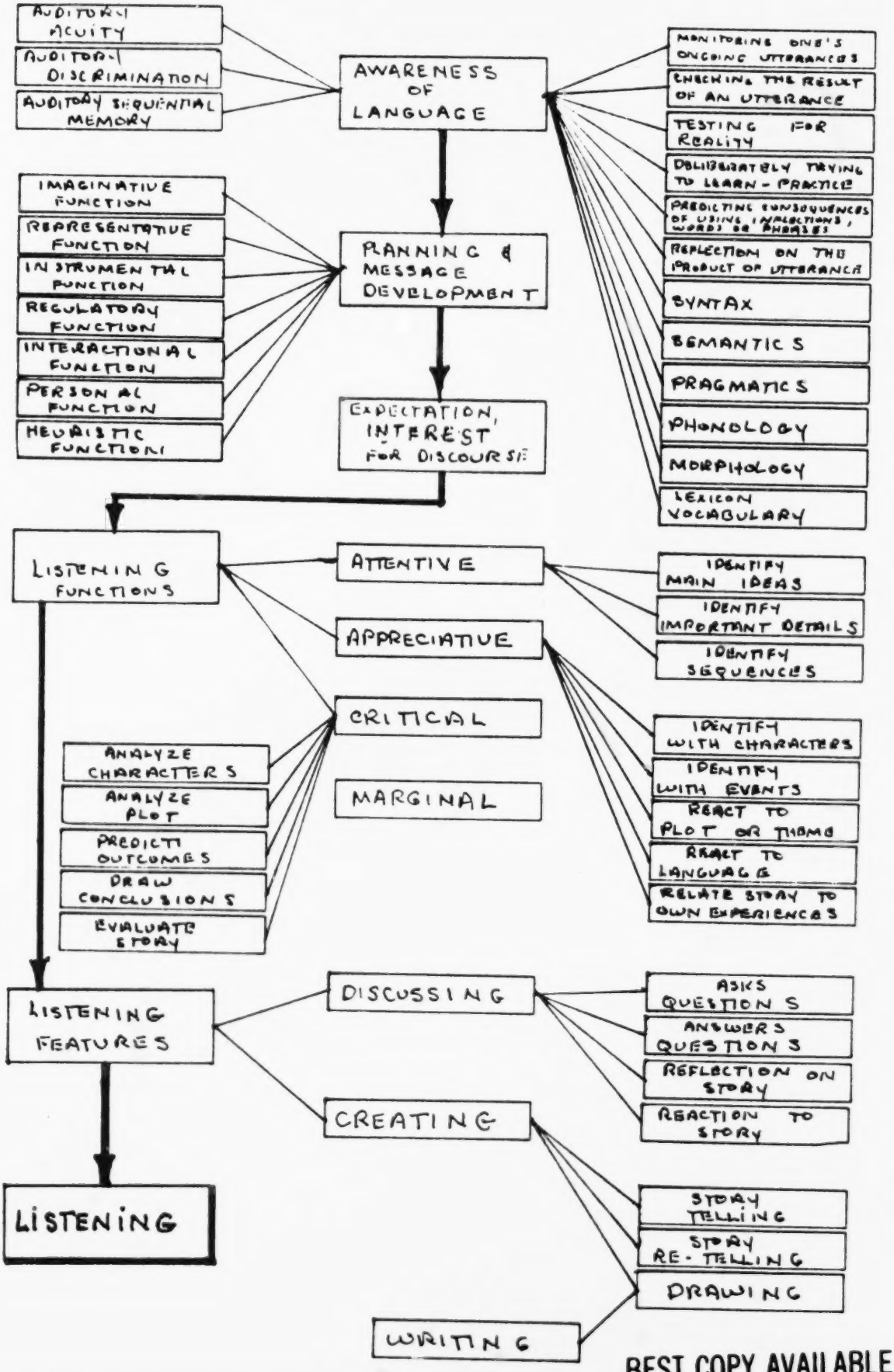

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FIGURE 2-2 LISTENING FUNCTIONS & FEATURES

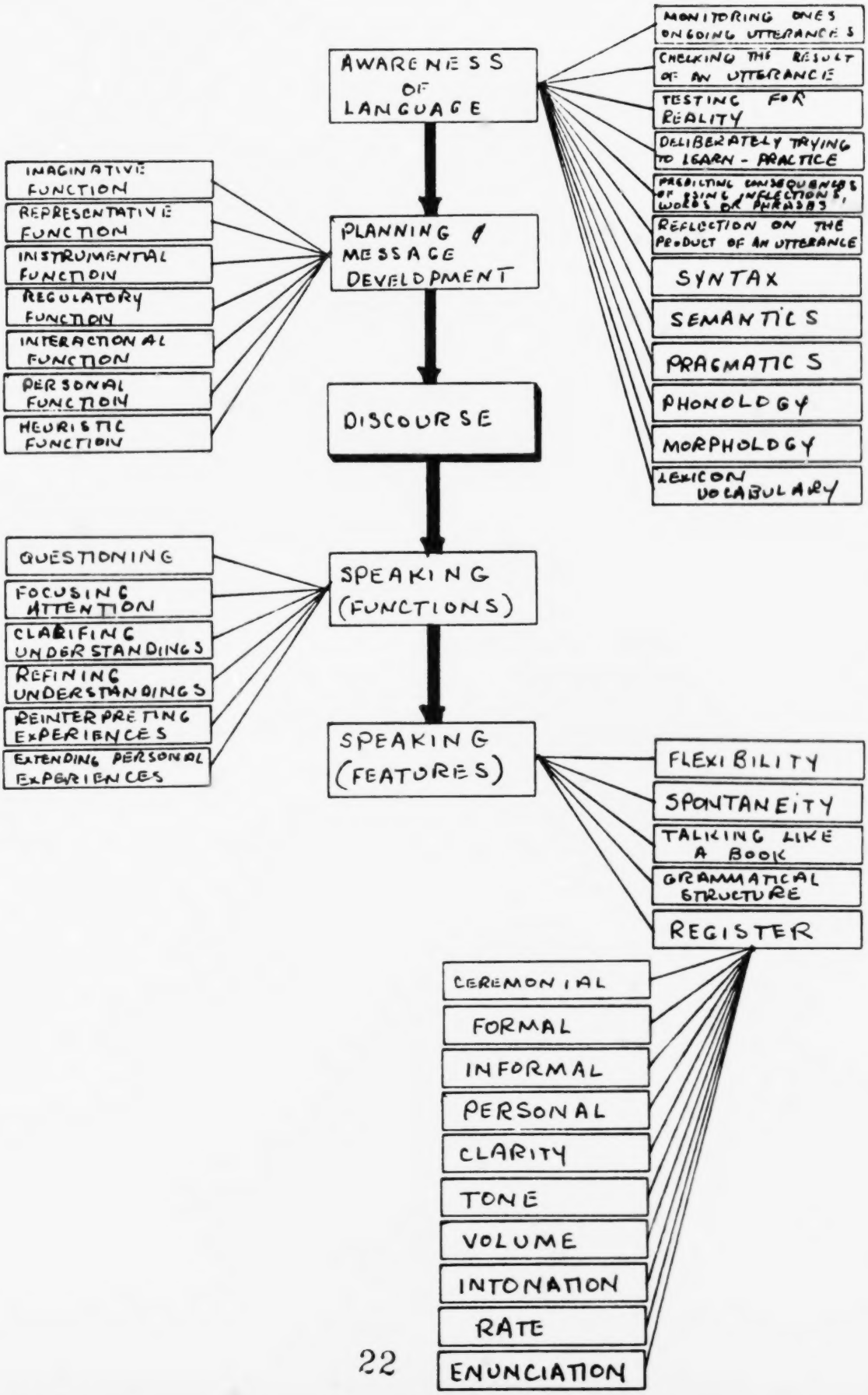
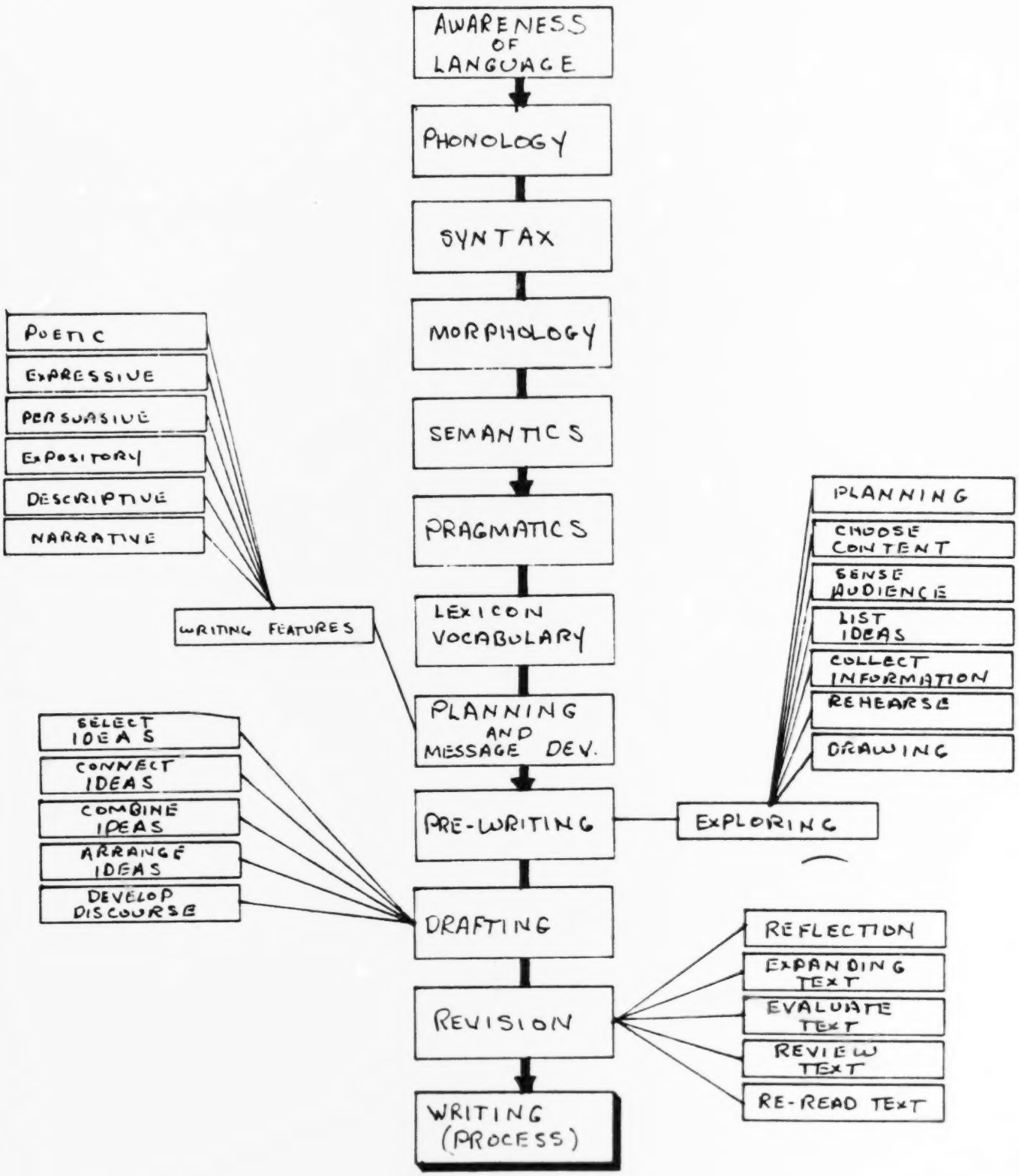


FIGURE 3 SPEAKING



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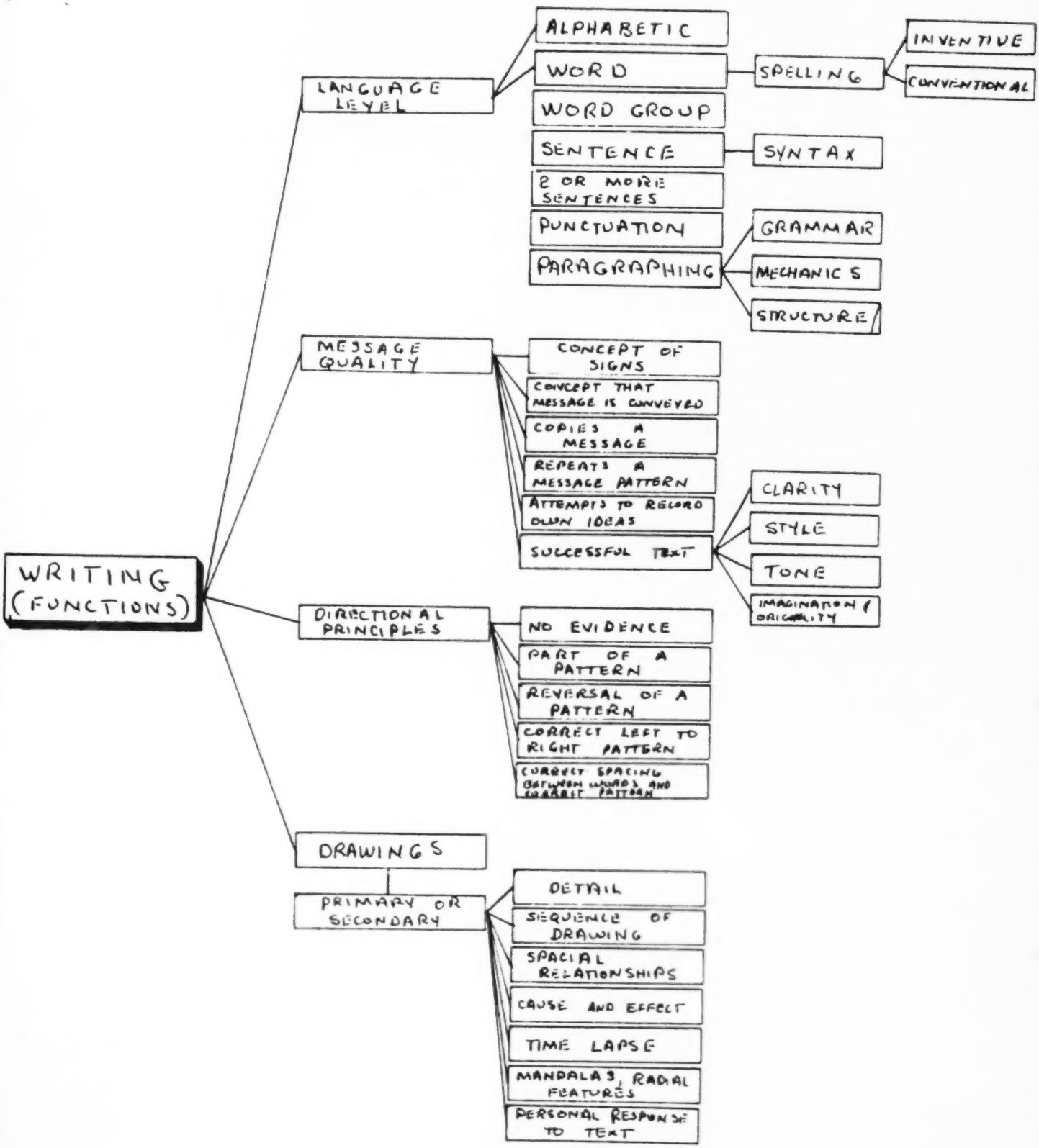

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FIGURE 4-2 WRITING FUNCTIONS

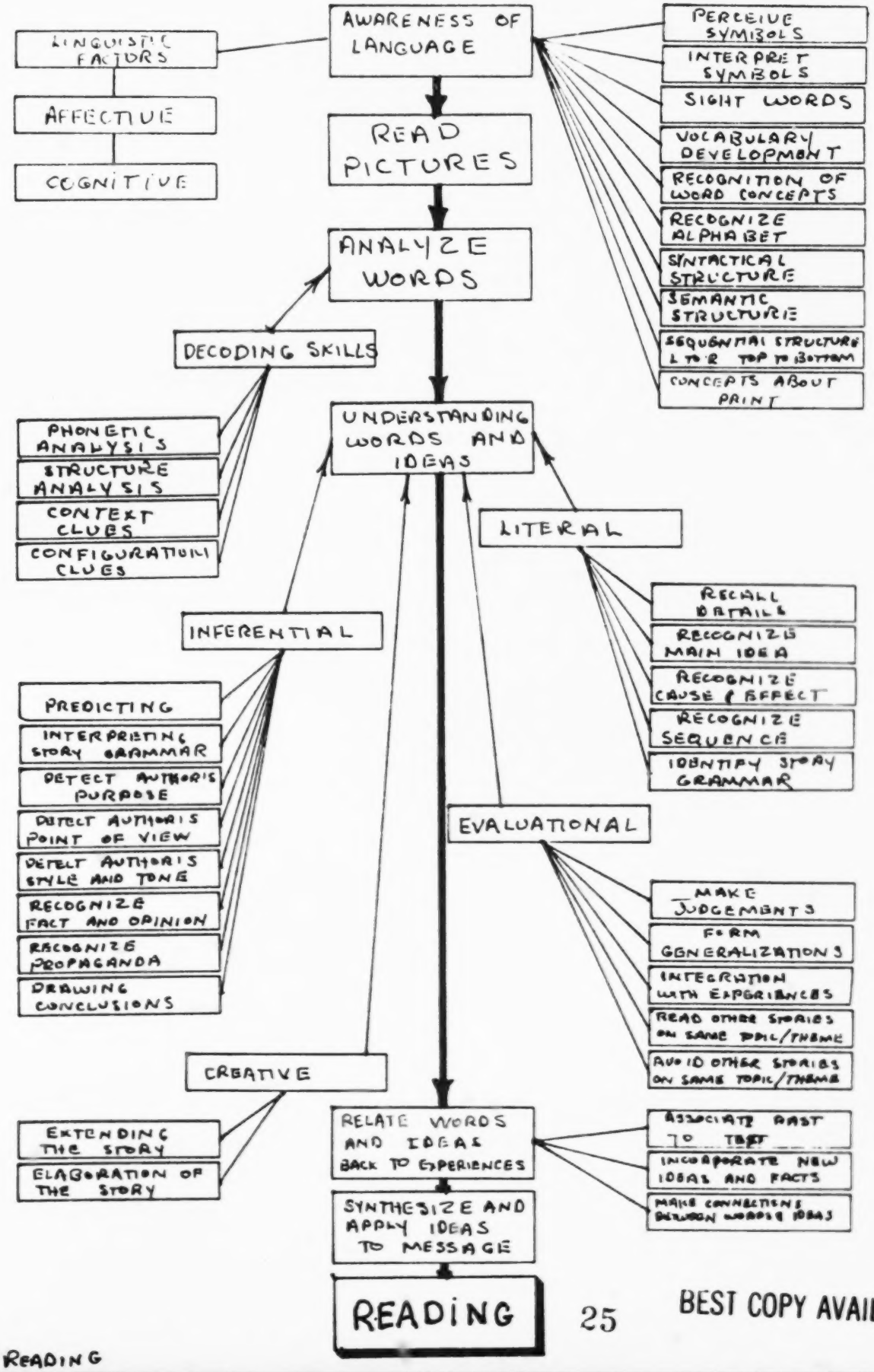

FIGURE 5 READING

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Figure 4 MEANING CONSTRUCTION